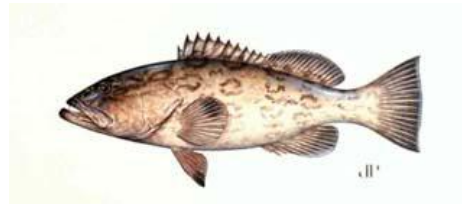


Snapper and Grouper Management in South Atlantic Federal Waters

Gag and Shallow Water Grouper Commercial Closure

Frequently Asked Questions

October 2012



When will gag and shallow water grouper species close to commercial harvest?

- Gag and the shallow water grouper species will close at 12:01 AM on October 20, 2012.

When will gag and shallow water grouper species open again to commercial harvest?

- Commercial harvest and possession of gag and shallow water grouper species will be prohibited for the rest of 2012.
- A January-April spawning season closure is in place for gag and the shallow water grouper species.
- Commercial harvest of gag and shallow water groupers will open at 12:01 AM on May 1, 2013.

Is harvest of gag and shallow water groupers still open for the recreational sector?

- The prohibition for harvest and possession of gag and shallow water groupers only applies to commercial fishermen who possess a federal Unlimited or 225 Pound Limited Snapper-Grouper Permit.

Will recreational harvest of gag and shallow water groupers be allowed by commercial fishermen during the commercial harvest prohibition?

- Fishermen with federal commercial snapper-grouper permits will be allowed to retain the recreational bag limit of gag and shallow water grouper species during the October 20, 2012, to December 31, 2012, commercial quota closure.
- During a commercial harvest prohibition, fishermen with federal snapper grouper commercial permits cannot sell the recreational bag limit.
- Fishermen with federal Unlimited or 225 Pound Limited Snapper-Grouper Permits will not be allowed to retain gag and shallow water groupers the January-April spawning season closure for these species because the closure applies to both the commercial and recreational sectors.

Which species are considered shallow water groupers?

- Shallow water grouper species include gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, rock hind, red hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin grouper, and yellowmouth grouper.

Why do all shallow water grouper species close when gag closes?

- An assessment conducted in 2006 indicated gag was experiencing overfishing (fish being removed too quickly) and was approaching an overfished condition (the number of fish in the population too low).
- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council developed Amendment 16 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 16) to end overfishing of gag.
- Amendment 16 established a commercial quota and required NOAA Fisheries to prohibit commercial harvest of gag when the commercial quota is met or projected to be met.
- To reduce incidental catch of gag after the commercial quota is met, Amendment 16 also requires NOAA Fisheries to prohibit the harvest of all shallow water grouper species after the commercial quota is met

because they have a similar life history and could co-occur with gag. So, if fishermen targeted species such as red grouper or scamp after gag was closed, gag could be taken as bycatch.

What other measures have been taken to end gag overfishing?

- A January-April commercial and recreational closure for gag and shallow water grouper species has been established to protect them during their spawning season.
- The grouper aggregate bag limit has been reduced from 5 fish per person per day to 3 fish per person per day and no more than 1 gag or 1 black grouper can be retained. The grouper aggregate includes: Misty grouper, red grouper, scamp, yellowedge grouper, snowy grouper, yellowfin grouper, blueline tilefish, sand tilefish, golden tilefish, coney, graysby, red hind, rock hind, gag, black grouper, and yellowmouth grouper.

What are the commercial ACLs and AMs for gag and shallow water groupers?

- The commercial annual catch limits are: 352,940 pounds gutted weight for gag; 284,680 pounds whole weight for red grouper; 341,636 pounds whole weight for scamp; 90,575 pounds whole weight for black grouper; and 49,488 pounds whole weight for the remaining shallow water grouper species (red hind, rock hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin grouper, and yellowmouth grouper).
- If a commercial ACL (individual or complex) is met or is projected to be met, all subsequent purchase and sale will be prohibited and harvest and/or possession will be limited to the bag limit.
- If a species (black grouper, scamp, rock hind, red hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin grouper, and yellowmouth grouper) is overfished and the ACL is exceeded, then the ACL in the following year will be reduced by the amount of the overage. This provision applies to red grouper regardless of the overfished status.

What are the recreational ACLs and AMs for gag and shallow water groupers?

- The recreational annual catch limits are: 340,060 pounds gutted weight for gag; 362,320 pounds whole weight for red grouper; 150,936 pounds whole weight for scamp; 155,020 pounds whole weight for black grouper; and 48,329 pounds whole weight for the remaining shallow water grouper species (red hind, rock hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin grouper, and yellowmouth grouper).
- If a recreational ACL (individual or complex) is exceeded, the length of the following fishing year will be reduced.
- If a species (black grouper, scamp, rock hind, red hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin grouper, and yellowmouth grouper) is overfished and the ACL is exceeded, the ACL will be reduced in the following year by the amount of the overage. This provision applies to red grouper regardless of the overfished status.

Are any new measures being considered by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council for gag and shallow water groupers?

- Yes, the South Atlantic Council is considering an action in Regulatory Amendment 15 to the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan that would remove the provision that commercial harvest of all shallow water grouper species is prohibited when the gag quota is met.
- The South Atlantic Council will be discussing Regulatory Amendment 15 at their December 2012 meeting.